

C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 002084

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: KAMANDA WA KAMANDA ANOTHER PRESIDENTIAL HOPEFUL

Classified By: Ambassador Roger Meece. Reason 1.4 (b/d)

11. (C) The Ambassador paid a courtesy call on Minister for Scientific Research Gerard Kamanda wa Kamanda at his office November 8. Kamanda had earlier contacted the Ambassador by telephone requesting such a meeting as soon as could be arranged. (Note: Kamanda holds his current portfolio under the Sun City Accord as a member of the political "opposition" with his own party, the Common Front of Nationalists. Kamanda is a former Foreign Minister during the last years of the Mobutu regime, again at the time representing "opposition" forces. He fled into exile for a period following the May 1997 seizure of Kinshasa by Laurent Kabila's ADFL forces. End note.)

12. (C) After opening pleasantries, Kamanda ran through a list of current political issues, gradually building a case testifying to the relative inability of current major party leaders to move transition political processes forward in a timely fashion. Continuing, he commented that the remaining old generation politicians (e.g., Etienne Tshisekedi) had already demonstrated their inability to govern adequately, and that some of the newer very young people on the scene appeared to lack adequate experience or skills. Therefore, Kamanda concluded another option should be available. He said he wished to confide that he would be putting his own candidacy forward in Presidential elections, and added that he would like U.S. support.

13. (C) The Ambassador responded firmly that the U.S. strongly supports open and fair elections, but would maintain a position of strict neutrality regarding individual candidates or parties. He asked if Kamanda plans a public announcement of his candidacy soon; Kamanda hedged his response suggesting that timing would depend on events in the country. The Ambassador also inquired about Kamanda's ability to conduct a national campaign in terms of organization and funds. Kamanda expressed confidence, implying that the essentials of a nation-wide provincial network are already in place.

14. (C) Comment: There is already a great deal of political positioning in anticipation of elections, and at least some tentative moves toward coalition-building. It is unclear if Kamanda, with a political base in Bandundu province and somewhat limited national exposure, is in fact serious about pursuing an independent candidacy as the nominee of his relatively small party. Alternatively, Kamanda could be laying the groundwork seeking to increase his bargaining position in negotiations with one or more other parties. Kamanda's disclosure in any event is another sign that the early electoral season is very much underway. End comment.

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